

Let's Listen 10

The pieces for these lessons are taken from the collection ***Classics for Children***, a set of 2 CDs, issued by Decca, Catalogue number 458 592-2, available from Virgin priced at approximately €13.95. However, the pieces featured are also available on many other recordings, and may already be in your school.

Fossils from Carnival of the Animals

Composer: Camille Saint-Saens, 1835-1921

Background Information for the Teacher

Camille Saint-Saens was born in Paris. He was a child prodigy, who excelled in Latin, archaeology, botany, astronomy, as well as music. His greatest love, however, was music, and he excelled as a piano player and composer, creating his first composition at the age of three years, and giving his first public piano recital at the age of eight! In adult life he worked as a composer and performer, and travelled widely giving concerts and talks. His private life was not happy, and his marriage broke up shortly after his two young sons died within a few weeks of each other.

Saint-Saens wrote ***Carnival of the Animals*** while on holiday in Austria in 1886. He referred to it as a 'grand zoological fantasy.' It is a suite, or collection of musical pieces, each portraying a different animal. It includes ***Elephant, Swan, Wild Asses, Tortoises, Kangaroos, Cuckoo in the Woods***, and ***Aquarium***. Saint-Saens was afraid that the composition would affect his reputation as a serious composer, so he would not allow it to be publicly performed during his lifetime. Nowadays, it is Saint-Saens' most popular work.

When using Carnival of the Animals with children, it is best to use individual pieces from the suite, rather than expecting the children to concentrate on the entire suite. In a previous edition of InTouch, we explored ***Elephant***. This time, we are going to listen and respond to ***Fossils***.

Fossils from Carnival of the Animals

This article is one of a series that first appeared in INTO InTouch magazine in 2002-2003 written by Mary Ryng

Possible presentation for Middle Classes

- First teach or revise the folk tunes 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' and 'Au Clair de la Lune'
- Teacher tells the class that they are going to listen to a piece of music, which is called **Fossils**. Elicit from the pupils what a fossil is. Then tell them that the composer was playing a musical joke. In this piece, he uses the xylophone, which gives a short dry sound, just like old bones. But there are also some other fossils in the piece – if they listen very carefully, they will hear snippets of tunes they already know. They must listen very carefully because the piece is so short – just 1 minute 19 seconds.
- The recording is played, and the children raise their hands if and when they recognise a song snippet. Children usually seem to hear 'Twinkle' first. If they don't hear 'Au Clair de la lune' at the first hearing, play the piece through again – it follows almost immediately after Twinkle. In the recording Classics for Children 'Twinkle' is introduced at 0 min: 25 sec, while 'Au Clair de la Lune' is introduced at 0 min : 30 sec.
- The music is played again, and the children are invited to name the instrument that plays at 0 min: 50 seconds. This is the clarinet, and in fact it is playing another 'fossil', this time a piece of music by the composer Berlioz. It plays for approximately 15 seconds.
- Discuss the instruments heard – this is an excellent piece to focus on the sound of the xylophone, the piano and the clarinet.
- The recording should be played often in the following days/weeks. Children could be asked to respond in different ways, eg, singing the folksongs, pointing to the instruments on an instrument chart, painting the fossils.

- The children could also follow the Pictorial Score as they listen to the music
 - The music begins with a short chord, then we hear the xylophone (picture 1), followed by a piano (Picture 2), the xylophone again, followed by the piano again. The children could each be given a copy of the Pictorial Score, and they point to the appropriate picture. The star represents the snippet of 'Twinkle Twinkle' heard at 25 seconds, while the moon represents the snippet of 'Clair de Lune' heard at 30 seconds.

Possible presentation for Junior and Senior classes

- The class teacher is the best person to modify above for his/her class.
- Younger children may like to dance like a dried up old skeleton every time that the xylophone plays.
- They could hold up a star when the Twinkle theme is played, and a moon when the Clair de Lune theme is played.
- They may like to listen for the sound of the piano, the xylophone and the clarinet.

- Senior classes may like to devise their own pictorial scores to represent what is happening in the music

- They will be able to decide what instrument families the clarinet and xylophone belong to (Clarinet belongs to woodwind, while the xylophone belongs to the percussion family)

- The most important thing is to enjoy the music and to make it a pleasurable experience for the children.